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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to discover why students are demanding participation in the decision-making processes of the university, the author examines four of the most common issues they have raised: (1) student conduct codes and disciplinary procedures. This is an area in which modern college students reject institutional authority; (2) a voice in the hiring, promotion, and discharge decisions with reference to faculty, and sometimes administrators. This issue seems to stem from students' concern with instructional quality; (3) curriculum planning. A major concern is for the relevance of undergraduate education to students' needs, goals, and lives in general; and (4) admissions and graduation requirements, grading systems, and other matters which lead to certification. Today's students come to college with the intent of learning "how to make life good to live" rather than "how to live the good live." Because students and faculty are more heterogeneous than before, are more aware of social issues, and are less patient with the traditionally slow academic pace, it would seem that the goals of colleges need to be changed from those stated 20 years ago. Conflicts seem to stem from the college goals perceived by faculty and administration as opposed to those seen as appropriate by students. When communication among faculty, students and administration breaks down, or the students are unable to bring about changes by going through regular channels, then demonstrations take place. (WM)

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In discussing the issue of student participation in the decision-making processes of the university, one most often finds the discussants concerned with the question of whether or not students should be permitted such participation. Even at those institutions where student participation in some form is already a fait accompli some members of the faculty still now, and will continue, to question the advisability of incorporating students into the deliberative process. This continuing questioning is good--and appropriate in a university setting. I must admit, however, to finding this question a little strange in the present climate in higher education admitting in the same breath that I found the question of student participation per se very strange when it first arose.

I was, at that time (about five years ago) a member of a joint student-faculty committee which had a tradition of some 20 odd years on our campus. This committee supervised--in a very general way--the student organizationsand activities on our campus.

I have described this committee as a joint student-faculty committee. And indeed, it was, in our terms (that is, the faculty). We thought of it as a joint committee. Of course, the students had no vote, they didn't count in constituting a quorum, and they often had trouble getting recognized. Of course, none of this was terribly important since most of the decisions were made by the faculty before the meeting.

Oh, yes, we caucussed--quite casually. In the halls, at lunch, over the telephone. And without---would you believe it--without any ill intent. We didn't even think about it. We didn't question the propriety of our behavior. We didn't question our right to "really" make the decisions. We were, in fact, very kind and patronizing in all of our contacts with students.

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When students on other campuses began demanding membership on faculty committees, we felt very smug. Didn't we already have "student members" on this one committee? And weren't things working beautifully? And didn't we have a lot to learn!

Well, I tell this story so that you will know how far I, at least, have come. I think the question of whether or not there will be student participation is settled for the time being. I prefer, therefore, to ask <u>why</u> are students demanding this participation? The story I have just told certainly supplies part of the answer. But only a part. There are certainly other reasons--important other reasons. And these other reasons may turn out to be more important in the long run to the institutions of higher education in America than they are to the students who are presently enrolled in those institutions.

In an attempt to discover why students want a piece of the "decision-making action," I have examined some of the most common issues they have raised on campuses all over the country. I shall discuss briefly four of these issues in terms of possible causative factors and in terms of the possible long-term benefits as a result of these issues being raised.

1. One issue very often raised is the question of student conduct codes and student disciplinary procedures. These are really two separate issues but they are obviously related and there are some common elements in the students reactions to these codes and procedures. In the past, these codes and procedures have generally been written, ratified and monitored by the faculty and/or the administration. There have been, of course, some schools with one or two students on the discipline committees. These codes of conduct and discplinary regulations and procedures can best be described as the institutionalization of the "in loco parentis" concept. Now, there is a least one thing wrong with this concept in relation to most of today's college students. Most of them have already removed their parents from that position we are trying to stand in loco of. As Jencks and Riesman (The Academic Revolution) point out

> "...by the time today's young people reach college some have already been through the family break and are ready for a more mature role." (pg. 42)

Today's college student simply rejects our authority in this area--and I think quite rightly.

The second problem related to conduct codes and disciplinary procedures is the fact that they generally have been very loosely written leaving much room for administrative judgement and leaving the student in the position of (1) not knowing exactly what was expected of him (e.g. what exactly is conduct prejudicial to the university) and (2) not knowing how to handle himself when he finds himself in trouble--since the rights of the student were seldom spelled out--if referred to at all.

I said a minute ago that the students reject our authority over their non-academic conduct and that I agreed with their position. Two other statements must also be made in relation to this. First, by removing the authority of the university, its protection is also removed and second the faculty will insist upon its continuing responsibility to judge and react to the academic misconduct of students.

2. Another issue often raised by students is their desire to have a voice in the hiring, promotion and discharge decisions with reference to faculty--primarily--although also sometimes with reference to administrators. The students' major stated concern, however, is with the quality of instruction they are receiving. And because of the students concern with instruction, the whole question of faculty responsibility for teaching, research, and public service has been reopened for discussion. The focus of this discussion is on the teaching function which, in the past, had been relegated to the never-never land those useless activities that cannot be "evaluated." Most university people, faculty and administrators alike, claim great difficulty in evaluating teaching ability and relative ease in evaluating research and public service. And because research and public service are so much more "point-out-able" than is skill in teaching, the reward system in higher education reflects the preference of those involved for avoiding ambiguity. Promotions and salary increases are seldom based on good teaching skill; they are based almost exclusively on research and public service. Because of student insistence on the evaluation of teaching, however, new efforts are being made in this direction. At some institutions even student evaluation has begun to be considered valid.

3. A third area in which students want a voice is in the area of curriculum planning. Here we most often hear the

cry for relevance. I know it is popular these days to apologize for using that term. I do not believe such apologies ought to be made. They suggest that the term is both overused and lacking in real meaning. It is also popular these days to respond to the cry for relevance with the question "relevant to what?" I consider this question an academic and intellectual cop-out. It is the faculties way of avoiding an issue which, for them, is both painful and troublesome. It is quite clear that the student means relevant to him; relevant to his needs, relevant to his goals, relevant to his life. In the call for relevance, the student is demanding that the material presented to him be related to the issues of his concern and he wants to understand how the tools of the various disciplines can be applied to the understanding and solution of the problems he faces now and expects to face later. He wants to be taught History in a way that will help him to understand how the world which he is inheriting got into the mess that it is in. He wants to be taught psychology in a way which will help him to understand his own feelings of alienation and hostility and anxiety. He wants to be taught Sociology in a way which will help him to understand why groups behave in the ways they do, not simply the statistics of that behavior. He wants to be taught the meanings and intents of modern writers--from Camus to Cleaver--not simply a catalog of their explicit statements. The stock response to these kinds of questions is "he will get these things in the more advanced courses. First he must learn the basics and when he has met all of the prerequisites he can register for a course the History of Revolutions, or the Psychology of Personality or Existentialism.

But do today's students in fact need all of these prerequisite introductory courses? Is not today's student better prepared and more sophisticated than the student of 20 years ago? And even if he is not, are there not other curricular arrangements (like the intense in depth short course) which will give the student what he wants and still be academically sound? Is it not good pedagogy to take advantage of the student's motivation where one finds it?

All of these are troublesome questions to a faculty. They mean rethinking courses, curricula, prerequisites, etc., and possibly--even probably--changing many of them. And this in addition to the ongoing demands of the institution and of the discipline for research and publication.

Perhaps this question of relevance can be better understood if we examine it in its presently most extreme manifestation. I refer to the demand for black studies programs made by black students. This is, in my view, simply another instance of the relevance issue, but an instance which is more salient because black students in large numbers are such a new phenomenon in higher education and this strange demand eminates from them. In demanding black studies these black students are asking questions such as the following: What good is a history course which tells me nothing about how I arrived at my present status? What good is a Psychology course which tells me nothing about the nature of prejudice? What good is a Political Science course which tells me nothing about how to eliminate discrimination or how to manipulate the power structure which has kept me the underdog for so long? They are saying teach me economics in a way which will make me understand why I am poor and you are not. Teach me music in a way which will show me the relationships between the forms of that art with which I am most familiar and the forms with which you are most familiar.

These questions are not different in kind from the questions raised by the general student population. They are only different in the degree to which they require the faculty to reach beyond its traditional concerns.

4. Another area of student concern has to do with such things as admissions requirements, graduation requirements, grading systems and the like. While the question of relevance relates to education, the questions of how to get in and how to get out relate to certification. The collection of the right points, both in terms of required courses and high grades are a very important concern of every student--even if he doesn't feel he's learning anything he wants to graduate anyway. After all, he needs that degree to enter the establishment at an acceptably high level.

Again to quote Jencks and Riesman:

> "The majority of those who enter college are plainly more concerned with accumulating credits and acquiring licenses than with learning any particular skill while enrolled. They are mostly eager to take "advanced placement" and other examinations that yield credits and hasten their degree without teaching them anything, whereas they are most reluctant to do academic work

> for which they receive no official recognition or reward. Yet it would be misleading to assume that the emphasis on certification derives exclusively from students. There are only a handful of colleges that make even nominal efforts to eliminate grades as the prime incentive for academic work, and we know of no college that refrains from making judgements about the relative ability and competence of the students whose education it has attempted.... There is no necessary reason for America to entrust both the education and the certification of the young to the same institution...(however) the two are inexorably and deliberately intertwined, each function being modified in some ways to facilitate the other." (pgs. 61-63)

The fact is, however, that we--the universities--are in the business of certification. Perhaps we should consider the virtues--or lack thereof--of continuing in this business. Admittedly, even if we decide we should not, the question of how to get out of it remains an extremely difficult one. And it would be complicated by the further question of whether or not college students really want us out of it. While they don't always trust us, they trust us more than alternative institutions of certification. There is, after all, something to be said for the devil, you know.

Let me now summarize the advantages I see, for the university and for the student in having student participation in the University. But first let me mention the following:

1. Higher education can no longer be considered the privilege of the few but rather the right of many.

2. The college going population of today and tomorrow differ in character from the college population of the decades since World War I and through the end of World War II and even, probably, since as recently as 1960.

Some ways in which this college population is different are:

A. More heterogeneous; i.e., not necessary middle and upper class, more minority group representative, more non-WASP ethnic representation, greater age spread, etc.

3. Because of this change in student population, the motive which brings the student to higher education also differs;

e.g., fewer students come to the undergraduate college now with the intent of "learning how to live the good life," and more come with the intention of vocational preparation and/or the desire to learn "how to make life good to live."

4. The faculty is not of the same character as it has been in the past either, i.e., younger, more heterogeneous in its socio-economic and ethnic background (due to graduate college opportunities opened up after the end of World War II).

5. Both these groups, the new student and the new faculty, are more aware of social issues and less patient with the traditional academic pace of "all deliberate slowness."

6. For the most part, students come to undergraduate college these days with a broader exposure to, and knowledge of, social problems and a greater concern about these.

It follows from these changes that one expects that the goals of the undergraduate college, particularly the Liberal Arts College, would be in need of modification in comparison with goals that were appropriate twenty years or more ago.

Evidence with reference to changing the goals and curricula of the undergraduate Liberal Arts College suggests that the kind of modifidations which follow from the facts mentioned have been slow in coming and have appeared spontaneously in very few places. Entrenched faculties have found great difficulty in revising their attitudes in relation to the goals of the undergraduate college and have found great difficulty in finding curricular adjustments which they consider in their terms to be academically sound. This is the basic question in the issue of relevance; that is, a conflict between the goals of college as preceived by the faculty and administration, as opposed to goals which seem appropriate in the preception of the undergraduate student.

Another complicating factor in the cry for relevance has to do with the students' inability to bring about change through that discourse and discussion which the university holds so dear. University faculties are not accustomed to giving serious consideration to the complaints and requests for change initiated by students and because of this lack of familiarity, have again found it difficult to respond to these requests. It is at this point that, i.e., the breakdown in

communication and/or the inability of the student to bring about changes on the basis of "going through channels," that the more active type of student participation, i.e., the demonstration, comes about.

A. They challenge our assumptions, e.g.,

1. that an undergraduate major should be only preparation for graduate school.

2. that two years of a high school language are a necessary prerequisite to a successful college career.

3. that a structured Gen Ed program still has a function.

4. that a university ought to stand in loco parentis.

They challenge our assumptions about our authority, our function, our methods and our morality. These assumptions should be challenged and questioned continually. In short, the students are helping us to stay honest.

I. Advantages of student participation.

II. Disadvantages

A. Students are transients and 1) each group has to be educated in terms of procedures, powers, etc., and 2) don't see long view.

B. inexperienced in decision-making.

C. have insufficient time-often-to "do their homework" on the issues.

Some say "what about next set of students?". This is valid only if the institution simply capituates to demands instead of considering the issue. Also, maybe we should change again in four or eight years.

Kingman Brewster statement.

III. How are they to participate?
On what issues?
To what extent?